

February 7, 1991 (pg. 20)

Shortgrass Country

by Monte Noelke

Everytime I head west I stop for fuel at a small town on Highway 67 called Barnhart. The gas station owner is an old friend. He goes way back to and through the drouths and depressions that have plagued the Shortgrass Country. What I'm saying is that we don't have to do any background worked to be on familiar terms.

Changes have taken place at the station. Years ago, the local citizens played dominoes there nearly every day. A couple of herders and an hombre are two that are forgotten made up some plenty salty teams of double-six experts.

Other things took place, too, besides the domino matches. Once when I stopped for gasoline, he pointed out that an oil hauler's truck had slid on the icy highway and knocked a hole in the building across the street, making it the only drive-in location in town.

But the other day when I visited him I discovered he was an inventor. Right beside the old domino table that now is used for coffee cups and western novels and detective magazines was an empty 25-gallon oil barrel that was taking care of the entire disposal needs of that part of the station, including the owner's and the customer's tobacco

habits and their wintertime custom of peeling pecans by the stove.

On the spot, I ordered a similar barrel to go in my kitchen at the ranch. Trash accumulates around a bachelor's quarters about as fast as it does in a country filling station. At the least, I have to empty my waste-baskets three or four times a year and that's not counting the big clean-up month of February for all the Christmas holiday crowd.

Too bad he didn't have that barrel in the domino players can be mighty messy when they become excited.